DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 076 720 UD 013 497

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TITLE	Portuguese Enclaves: The Invisible Minority.
PUB DATE	Mar 73
NOTE	16p.; Paper presented at the Southern Anthropological Society meeting, Wrightsville Beach, N. C., March 1973
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Acculturation; *American History; Discriminatory Attitudes (Social); *Group Relations; Individual Characteristics; Migrants; *Minority Groups; *Personality; *Research Methodology; Self Concept; Sociocultural Patterns
IDENTIFIERS	Portuguese Americans

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the identity profile which emerged in investigations conducted in various Portuguese-American communities, offers an explanation for the nature of the profile, and discusses the implications of the data. The historical raison d'etre which underlies all cultural identities is stressed. Without an understanding and reasonably thorough grasp of the context of contacts, one cannot understand sociocultural forces which have been operating to create any identity. (DM)

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Portuguese enclaves: The invisible minority[1]

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The growing anthropological emphasis on complex societies has led us to redefine, invent, or place increasing emphasis upon certain concepts and approaches which hold special significance in the study of large-scale, heterogeneous sociocultures. Terms such as 'identity,' 'boundary' and 'social networks' present us with constructs very different from those usually in the fore when studying tribal society. The latter groups are usually treated (albeit artifically at times!) as isolated units with homogeneous cultures. The cultural variability of complex societies forces us to give up this more simplistic approach, to concentrate more on process than on structure.

The study of various Portuguese-American communities[2] has not only provided some much-needed ethnographic data on these relatively unknown people but also offers interesting insights which are relevant to the above-mentioned methodological concerns. This paper will present the identity profile which emerged after investigations with both Insiders and Outsiders; will offer a historically-based explanation for both the peculiarly self-pejorative nature of that profile, as well as the fact that the identity is said to be due to the highly traditional nature of Portuguese-American culture; and, finally, discuss the larger, theoretical implications of the data. The diachronic focus of the analysis will stress a processual interplay of forces operating between sociocultural segments and across the boundaries established by the delineation of Portuguese identity.

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An initial methodological problem is the statement of definitions. The terms 'identity' and 'boundary' have a variety of parameters in the anthropological and sociological literature. As used here <u>identity</u> will refer to the

characteristics--the 'model personality,' if you will--which a group, generally, is said to possess. The resultant profile may be determined by members of the group in question or may be compared and contrasted with the identity as perceived by Outsiders or the investigator.[3] It should be clear that any group possesses a number of identities and the scientific observer is well to bear this caveat in mind. It must also be emphasized that the identity elements of the profile are rarely consistent. However, there is no reason that they need be. Contradictions and paradoxical pairs (and this is only a suggestion on my part) may have positive adaptive value since they allow an individual to select the appropriate support for behavior--regardless of which way it goes. This approach to the concept of 'identity' is much more limited than, say, Barth's who appears to conceive of the term as having much the same referents as the word culture (cf., his discussion on the 'identity-switch' of the Sudanese Fur, 1969: 23).

Another term of special significance, boundary, has markers which are both real (based on territorially-determined criteria) and abstract (focusing on statements of social relations and the organization of behavior.) Though the latter boundary is the more important of the two for the social scientist it is significant for this study that only the Portuguese of London, England do not live in a territorial enclave--i.e., a spatially cohesive 'neighborhood.'

In five of the six town/cities with which I am familiar[4] the consensus was that physical and social boundaries between the Portuguese and non-Portuguese are clearly drawn. There are, of course, networks which cross the boundaries: the Portuguese and non-Portuguese mix in school, on the job, in sports, and, minimally, residentially. But in one community 23 informants were questioned as to whom they would list as their five closest friends and 19 of them listed

no non-Portuguese--while the remaining four listed their three best friends as Portuguese. Although the Portuguese do marry out (and this is the correct term since marriage to a non-Portuguese does not bring the latter into the community--unless the stranger puts forth a concentrated effort to show he wishes to affiliate with the Portuguese rather than his natal group), the primary, almost the sole point of articulation between the Portuguese and non-Portuguese is in the economic sphere. Members of both groups perceive this lack of articulation and account for it in terms of Portuguese 'traditionalism'--that is, a reluctance on the part of immigrants and their descendants to give up European patterns and accept an American life-style. Some Portuguese argue that they try to be Americans but that various forces work against it: 'I don't want to hurt the old people too much'; 'You keep falling back into the old ways because you have to mix with the Greenies (new immigrants) who come in'; 'You work and live with Portuguese all the time and a lot of them don't want to change'; I don't like a lot of the old ways but my (husband, wife, father...) can't seem to break away.' But all agree the Portuguese cling to tradition.

Given this apparent emphasis by Portuguese-Americans on the preservation of the parent socioculture one would not be surprised to find either (a) a positive weighting on their traditional beliefs, values, and social structure or (b) a negative weighting on elements perceived as 'American.' But field data, as was just hinted, indicate that the reverse is actually the case. This is reflected both in conversations and actual observed behavior. Older women want to 'Americanize' their houses, their cooking, their dress, their life style generally; adult males admire men who don't 'behave like Greenies'; and young people consistently remark that a major cause of conflict with parents is the fact that the children are 'too American for the parents' liking. Contrariwise, people who are disliked or who are, for some reason, the object of ridicule, are called 'dumb Portygees'--with the emphasis on 'Portygee' (a

highly derogatory term) rather than 'dumb.' Typical pejorative remarks are: 'What do you expect from a Portuguese?'; 'That's a typical Portuguese for you!'; or, self-deprecatingly, 'That's a Portuguese way of doing it.'

Three profiles were obtained: (1) The view which the Portuguese held of themselves; (2) The view which they believed Outsiders held of them; (3) The view which Outsiders did hold of the Portuguese. There was almost total congruency among the three lists. Since my original study was not aimed at obtaining this information my data are not in a form amenable to quantification. Briefly, however, 'a typical Portuguese' is hard-working, clean, not too bright easy-going, respectful of authority, non-ambitious, thrifty, over-sexed, careful of property, uninventive, unimaginative, hospitable, cheerful, unable to deal with difficult problems or intricate mechanical items, cooperative, passive, and not much trouble to anyone. He is seen as disinterested in community affairs and incapable of organizing for effective political or economic change. A woman is a drudge; hard-working, submissive, and essentially concerned with her home and her family. A number of Portuguese men categorized women as gossipy and always fighting among themselves--causing trouble for men who would be friends with each other were it not for the feuds of the womenfolk. A Fall River Board of Education official claims that the Portuguese are the main reason why that city's educational level is one of the lowest in the nation; 8.8 years as compared to approximately 11.0 nationally, and 12.2 for the State.

An attempt to give historical depth to the analysis revealed that no matter where one looked--early scholarly studies, newspaper reports, ships logs, diaries--and regardless of the time depth--some documentary material dates from the late 18th century--the same ethnic characteristics are utilized to identify the Portuguese. It was in the course of searching for such material that an explanation began to take shape for both the genesis of the profile,

particularly its denigrative elements, and its continued persistence up to the present time.

U.S. Census data show that some 80% of all North American Portuguese immigrants come from the Azores, a group of islands in the mid-Atlantic some 900-1200 miles west of the mainland of Europe. The islands were uninhabited until they were settled by the Portuguese about 1450. Marginal to continental life the Azoreans lived an impoverished existence and appeared to occupy the position vis a vis the motherland of a forgotten stepchild. What wealth was available came from fishing trips to such areas in the New World as Newfoundland's Grand Banks and Georges Banks off Cape Cod. Fishing trips, the great whaling industry which began in the 18th century, and the florescence of the maritime mercantilism which reached its height in the 19th century, all combined to draw the Azoreans into contact with the outside world--particularly New England. The Azores became known to New Englanders as 'the Western Islands Whaling Grounds' and served not only as a place to hunt the highly profitable sperm whales but also to take on fresh supplies of water and food. Azoreans were used to replace seamen who were either unsuitable or managed to escape ashore. An 1842 narrative from a ship's log gives some indication of the importance of Islanders in the crew's composition:

> As the ship put out...the crew consisted of four Azoreans, two Irishmen, and eight Americans. At Fayal, one of the nine Azores, eight new crew members were added, five of whom were Azoreans. The other three were Americans waiting in port for a whaling ship in need of additional crew members (J. Ross Brown, diary, 1842, from Klewin, 1973: 69; italics mine).

By 1880 we are told that, 'the ratio of Azoreans in the whaling crews was even greater....A master harpooner...noted in his diary that "all of my crew...are Azorean, except one" (Klewin 1973: 69).

The Azorean doreymen, joining the Portuguese fleet to fish the North American waters, often sailed to New England ports and dumped their fish for sale on American wharfs. Then, instead of returning home to their families in the Islands, they would fish out of New England. Some men would leave the boats and sail with an American master. Portuguese boats were in the habit of dropping some men who wished to stay and replacing them with men who were homesick for their parents, wives, children and familiar surroundings. Most of this movement in and out of New England by the Azoreans went unrecorded in the Government records and must be surmised from old documents such as ships' logs',marriage records, and the like. It appears that a common pattern was to emigrate to the U.S. so as to earn the money needed to return home in a few years and buy enough farm land and a good enough boat that one's family prosperity would be assured.

The significant point here is that the Portuguese of the Azores, unlike the majority of European immigrants from the continent, had a long and intimate contact with Americans and America. Indeed, the connections were of greater intensity and immediacy than those with the Portuguese mainland. Further, the connection was one of migratory fluidity; an Azorean did not see 'a trip to New England for a few years' in the same fashion as continental immigrants saw their permanent departure from their ancestral homes.

This interdigital relationship continued even after the decline of the maritime focus in New England. The textile industry began to boom and demanded labor. Many of the Portuguese came to work in the mills but, again, would return to the islands if a fishing vessel brought news of sickness, a wedding, or other family business.. Though an increasing number made the same residential committment as other immigrants there appears to have always been a closer sense of continued ties with those left behind. As late as the 1920s, when most Azoreans were employed in the textile mills, emigration from the U.S. to the

Azores remained remarkably high. From 1900 to 1920 U.S. census figures show that approximately 25% of the Islanders returned home (the figure probably should be much higher according to informants). Of those who returned, some 94% remained in the United States less than 10 years (Taft 1923: 117).

To summarize: The socio-historical evidence indicates that the Azoreans have been strongly dependent upon the United States since the late 18th century. Their reliance upon the economic edge provided by emigrants to the maritime and milling industries of New England was maximal. Yet the marginal existence of island life ill-equipped Azoreans for the contacts which they had with New England. Granted they had a far more realistic view of life in the United States than did most immigrants, this was more than off-set by their lack of education[5], which pressured for them to be placed in the most menial positions, and the absence of an incentive to carve a place for themselves in the larger social structure. Other immigrant groups came to New England, worked at jobs of drudgery for a time, and then employed a number of techniques to remove themselves from the ranks of the disadvantaged immigrant. The Portuguese remained in menial positions, paying little attention to labor agitators and social reformers alike. A hard life and unbelievable poverty even by European standards was their lot whether in the islands, as seamen, or laborers in the mills. They were willing to work extremely long hours at dangerous work for starvation wages, often with a good-natured smile and, at worst, with an air of passive resignation. One observer summed it up when he said, 'They are seekers of work, and if properly handled and guided are as good workers as are to be had anywhere' (Bannick 1917:60). They were, sociologically, 'the niggers of New England.'

Migratory mobility, easy access to news of home, greater ability to return home for short visits, a nostalgia and sentimentality for island life, and

a constant influx of short-term workers who moved back and forth with the nonchalance of a commuter catching the 7:15 to the City--all combined to create the Portuguese-American identity. Not only did the immigrant from the Azores tend to take a passive stance regarding the need--so sharply perceived by other foreign groups--to achieve a place in the power structure (which is not the same as desiring to acquire the material culture and 'worldly' attitudes of the socially elite); he also remained sufficiently involved with still-later arriving Greenies that he was tagged with the label 'traditional.' There was none of the frantic push to learn the essential skills of survival in a strange land; there was little of the desperate fight to be accepted into the dominant social system because the die had been cast and it was economically impossible to return home; there was little of the culture shock that stems from ignorance and accentuates differences. Thus, while marked cultural change did occur in the base-line patterns of the Azoreans they were not in the style which marked the assimilation of other ethnic groups. The mechanics of the Melting Pot ideal were altered and the folk response to this was that the Portuguese were loathe to give up Old Country ways.

Is it this charge of reluctance to Americanize, however, which accounts for the domination of pejorative elements in the identity profile of Portuguese-Americans? Why do the denigrative elements of slow-wittedness, lack of ambition, unimaginativeness, an unwillingness to learn new things appear to be most significant attributes of the identity profile for the Portuguese from both the Insiders' and Outsiders' views?

Again, I would suggest that the history of the U.S.-Azorean contacts will provide at least a partial explanation.

We have seen that the initial contacts between the two groups were based on maritime interests of both--Yankee seafarer and Azorean fisherman. If one can believe the description of life in the Islands Azoreans were astonishingly

poverty-stricken. The New England sailors and sea captains, on the other hand, were fighting for maritime supremacy--and for the riches that this would bring. They were willing to take chances, to innovate, to capitalize on the much-touted 'Yankee shrewdness and Yankee ingenuity.' Add to this the psycho-culturai factors that selected out the more conservative New Englander who kept his feet planted on the farm or his eyes focused on the ledger and it is clear American seafarers who had the most contact with the Portuguese peasant had a much different world view than the latter. The impoverished Azorean, like the poor everywhere, was reluctant to try the new and gamble with his small margin of security. Discussions which 'explain' peasant behavior by emphasizing their 'love of the land', their stolid, unimaginative attitudes, and their 'innate conservatism,' would do better, I think, to emphasize the restrictive parameters within which they operate--the narrow range of choices which the poor see as determining survival or starvation.

The Yankees tried to bring the Azorean into their sphere. 'Manifest destiny,' 'the sky's the limit,' 'luck-and-pluck/do-and-dare' were their slogans and they grew impatient and scornful of these men who would not try new techniques of whaling, invest part of their earnings in a cargo of teas and silks, rum and slaves, or build skimming clippers rather than plodding doreymen. But for the Portuguese a new tool or technique with which one was clumsy might mean death at sea; there was no spare money for a risky investment in a cargo that might never reach port--even if he did; and still less money among the Islanders to build sailing vessels.

So the Portuguese established a reputation for dullness, a reluctance to change, slowness in learning, shortsightedness--albeit hard-working, brave, and willing to face hardships cheerfully. The Yankee-derived identity was established for 100 years or more before the shift in occupational and immgration

patterns as a result of the movement into the textile mills. And there was nothing, really, in this shift which caused the Yankees to change their minds. Instead of seeing their jobs as the first step in a progression to becoming a Captain of industry[5] in the Horatio Alger tradition of the times the Portuguese, for the most part, remained as laborers--when they did not leave the factory to buy a boat, a small farm or return home to the Islands.

As for the Islanders themselves they were willing to accept this assessment of their identity. It appears not to have been too different from the profile perceived by the continental Portuguese of these marginal frontiersmen in a poor corner of the Portuguese empire. Further, what did it matter what Outsiders thought of the Portuguese? They valued them as workers and that meant jobs and <u>that</u> was the important thing. The fact that Azoreans had little if any entry into the decision-making circles of the power elite, that they had no voice in political or economic affairs, was of little concern. There was the constant reminder of what life in the Islands was like for those who did not have such an 'American connection,' when one compared the economic security which resulted from such a connection. It was of neglible significance that they were excluded from many social spheres. Did the Yankees, the Irish, the Italians by-pass them? How was this different from the way in which they were treated by the Portuguese from the continent? Such treatment, they reasoned, was the fate of an Islander. There was, then, little resentment or hostility, few attempts to break down and change the situation in the way in which other immigrants fought to become part of the decision-making structure.

Finally, the Portuguese could see how the more militant Irish and Italians were discriminated against. 'No Irish need apply,' 'No Micks, Dagos, or Dogs allowed in this Establishment!' Invisibility was protection against such discrimination--especially in relation to employment. Patronizing

though the Yankee stereo-type might be, it was better than active hostility which often erupted into gang warfare, the burning of houses--even whole blocks--which housed an unwanted ethnic group, or the desecration of churches. The Portuguese Sambo Stance[7] was good protective coloring.[8]

In summary, then, the historical period of minimal contact between Yankees and Portuguese;

1. Established the Yankee view of the Portuguese;
2. Gave the Portuguese realistic information concerning life in America which made the initial period of settlement for immigrants less trying;
3. Encouraged Azoreans to create regular channels by which he could return home temporarily or permanently;
4. Gave foreknowledge of prejudicial attitudes and the 'smart way' to get along.

Preliminary data indicate that the Portuguese immigrants and their descendants have been neither less nor more ready to accept new cultural patterns than any other group. Few of the first-generation Americans (i.e., native born children of immigrants)[9] know the language of their parents well, if indeed they know it at all. The religious patterns have undergone changes quite comparable to those, say, of Italian immigrants. American food, furniture, dress, appliances are all eagerly sought. American films,music, recreational activities and social behavior are seen as preferable to Portuguese. The aura of 'traditionalism'--accepted even by the Portuguese-Americans as part of their identity--is spurious but is one of the devices which shores up the total profile and insures the continuance of boundaries between Portuguese and non-Portuguese, Further, it has had the effect, to some extent,of being a self-fulfilling prophecy, particularly in the area of educational goals.

What of the theoretical significance of the material? Primarily, one must stress the multiplicity of identities which may exist for any given group. Not only must one be careful to delineate the origin of any given identity but one must also consider the implications of two or more profiles. What, for example is the result of two profiles (Insiders' and Outsiders') which are incongruent? If congruent, which has precedence historically? How realistic is the identity of self which Insiders believe Outsiders hold? What effect does cultural identity have on individual personality and decision-formation?

Another question is posed by Barth's argument that fluidity 'in patterns of recruitment or ascription' creates 'a variety of process which effect changes in individual and group identity' (1969: 21). Assuming the normal processes of cultural change in the islands; there is little question that there has been variability in ascription and probably recruitment as well; and, certainly, the processes of change which recruitment and/or ascription variability set into motion have occurred. Yet the changes in group identity which should have been brought about by these processual forces do not seem to have occurred. We have, it would appear, the interesting situation of an identity persisting in time despite the fact that most models of change would argue for its alteration--particularly, if my analysis of the data is correct, when that identity had little basis in fact but was the usual superficial and ethnocentrically biased view of a subordinate group by its economic overlords.

The data argue for the acceptance of both a mythical and an analytical identity. The former represents that which is claimed to be the usual or expected behavior; the latter is an empirically-based statement of behavioral reality.

Finally, one must be prepared to explore the implications of identity profiles and the boundaries which are created by them. What are the restrictions and links which those on either side of the boundary see as operating? To

what extent does identity determine the type and degree of intensity of network formation between groups in a plural society? What effect does this, in turn, have on action-group formation? What, in fact, is the relationship between social networks in a complex society and identity formation, stabilization, and/or change?

Most importantly, I have tried to stress the need to look at the historical raison d'etre which underlies all cultural identities. Without an understanding and reasonably thorough grasp of the context of contacts one cannot understand sociocultural forces which have been operating to create any identity.

Footnotes

1. Support for the field work upon which this study is based was granted by the Research Foundation of the State University of New York (1972). My thanks to my colleagues in the field. William Leap, Frances White, Maria Lydia Spinelli, and numerous informants--all of whom contributed generously to the study (though I am responsible for the content of this paper).

2. Plus the Portuguese of Toronto and London, England.

3. The Outsiders' characterization is often categorized as 'an ethnic stereotype' and is exemplified by the so-called 'music hall' or joke book characters (cf., Pat and Mike, Mrs. Nusbaum, 'dumb-Polack--or Swede' jokes, etc.) The Insiders' and investigator's views may be considered respectively,as emic and etic statements.

4. The communities were Rochester and Corning, New York; Provincetown and Fall River, Massachusetts; Newark, New Jersey; Toronto, Canada; and London, England.

5. Figures given by Bannick (1917: 39-41) dramatize this lack. A selection shows the differences. Of immigrants to the U.S. over the age of 14 who could neither read nor write the following figures (1899-1910) are given 'by race or people': African=19%, Armenian, 23.9%; Chinese, 7%; Croatian and Slavonian, 31.1%; Cuban, 6.3%; East Indian, 47.2%; North Italian, 11.5%; South Italian, 53.9%; Japanese, 24.6%; Lithuanian, 48.9%; Mexican, 57.2%; Pacific Islander, 24.7%; Portuguese, 68.2%, Scandinavian, .4%; Spanish, 14.5%, Syrian, 53.3%; Turkish, 59.5%. A study by Keerock Rook and Associates (1972: 27) for the Fall River City Planning Board stresses that, '58.8% of persons 25 years of age and over in the state have completed high school...25.6% in the City of Fall River (have done so). (It should be pointed out that those with a better education might <u>not</u> immigrate from Portugal, or would leave the economically depressed area of Fall River.)

6. It is interesting to note that New England maritime interests led to the adoption of the phrase 'captain of industry' with the obvious historical leap from ship captain to industrial leader.

7. I define the Sambo Stance as the adoption of behavior by a subordinate group which is perceived to be congruent with the identity held to be true by those of a superordinate group. It is 'agreeable' behavior and is often characterized by the large percentage of child-like or 'simple' traits which are assigned to a minority group. Such a stance makes a group 'invisible' but also is a comfort for the 'superior' group (since they are not challenged by reality) as well as a defense strategy for the 'inferior' group. It seems to create a sense of noblesse oblige on the part of the dominant group or, at least an attitude of affability which enables the subordinate individual to achieve some advantage in specific transactions.

8. In Newark the Portuguese young people have recently taken to sporting T-shirts emblazoned with the words 'Portuguese Power.' Though largely treated as a joke some people were upset by the attention which it attracted to the Portuguese. Still others failed to understand the joke--or the threat.

9. There is a disagreement between sociologists and anthropologists on this point. Anthropologists follow common usage while sociologists refer to immigrants as first-generation Americans and the first generation of native-born offspring as the second generation of Americans.

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